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ABSTRACT

The Black Mesa Community School, serving elementary school children in an isolated district of the Arizona Navajo reservation, represents the first step in Indian self-determination for area Navajos. The school is the result of community efforts begun in 1972 with a petition to operate a full-time school program for grades K-4 at Kitsilee. Continued community efforts included the operation of a local satellite school for grades K-8 and the 1977 attainment of independent status for the school. Classroom teachers and a Title I reading and ESL teacher now serve the three regular classrooms: pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, grades 1-4, and grades 5-8. The individualized school program, based on gradual transition from Navajo to English intruction and from a Navajo to a global cultural outlook, attempts to provide students with the skills necessary to succeed off the reservation while supporting the culture and values fundamental to life on the reservation. Although some weaknesses still exist, including impassable roads, temporary facilities, and funding difficulties, the Black Mesa school has resulted in community development including water, sewer, and electricity services; greater home-school contact; increased community pride and satisfaction; and improved student self-images. (SB)

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BLACK MESA
COMMUNITY SCHOOL

TEN YEARS LATER

A PROGRESS REPORT

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Respectfully Submitted

to

THE NAVAJO TRIBAL COUNCIL
The Navajo Nation
Window Rock, Arizona

by

BLACK MESA COMMUNITY SCHOOL BOARD, INC.
Black Mesa Community School
Black Mesa Chapter, The Navajo Nation
Box 215 Star Route 1 RRDS
Chinle, Arizona 86503

Members of the Board

Sam Honie, Chairman	Clyde Gilmore, Member
Mary Bitsui, Vice-Chairman	Ray Gilmore, Member
Mary Jane Dalton, Member	Anna Redhair, Member

Dorothy R. Yazzie, Executive Director
Jan-Jay Moolenijzer, Consultant to the Board

The Black Mesa Community School District encloses approximately 1,000 square miles of wooded, semi-arid desert on the northeastern edge of Black Mesa, one of the most isolated areas on the Navajo reservation. The roads that provide access from Pinon and Rough Rock are merely expanded dirt trails, often impassable during inclement weather.

Residents of the community have learned to involve themselves in the spartan life of the mesa. Heating their homes by hauling coal and chopping wood, hauling water from as far as 20 miles away, and performing other domestic chores keep them busy if not bored. Herding sheep and cattle to grazing land and water is also part of the community's traditional Navajo way of life.

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That education was the first area where development took place shows its importance in the priorities of the community. Once the school was established, with the school's and community's cooperative efforts, a community water system was installed and power lines brought into the community. Currently, a new Chapter House is being built and a community housing project has been approved and is slated to begin this summer.

The Black Mesa Community has long held a deep desire for improvement and development. The school was an important first step in this process of true Indian self-determination.

BLACK MESA COMMUNITY SCHOOL

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1972 - Kitsilee Chapter petitions Rough Rock Demonstration School Board to operate a full-time school program at Kitsilee.

- First Kitsilee School Board elected.

1973 - Rough Rock Demonstration School secures grant from the Office of Indian Education (Title IV) for the operation of Kitsilee Day School.

- First employees hired for the school.

- A materials grant from the Four Corners' Regional Foundation provides trailers and equipment to serve as temporary school facilities. Arizona Marine Corps Reserves assist with moving and installing the trailers at the school site. An extensive remodeling program is begun in conjunction with NPVTP to convert the trailers to school use.

1974 - Kitsilee Day School begins operation as a satellite program of Rough Rock Demonstration School; original intention to serve grades K-4 is expanded to include all elementary grades, at the request of the community.

1976 - Kitsilee submits a proposal to the Bureau of Indian Affairs to contract the operation of the school under the new Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (P.L. 93-638).

- First eighth-grade graduation ceremonies held.

1977 - After congressional intervention, Kitsilee Community School secures its first BIA contract, including $60,000 for upgrading facilities.

- A joint project of Public Health Service and Navajo Tribal Water Development culminates in the provision of potable water at the school.

- School assumes independent status; renamed Black Mesa Community School.

1978 - Electrical hook-up of the school facility to new power lines run from Yale Point is completed by NTUA.

- Black Mesa declared a federal disaster area due to impassable roads from spring rains and run-off. Most students sent home; others evacuated by federal rescue crews. School closed for three weeks.

1981 - Black Mesa school district boundaries agreed upon with Chinle Agency BIA office.

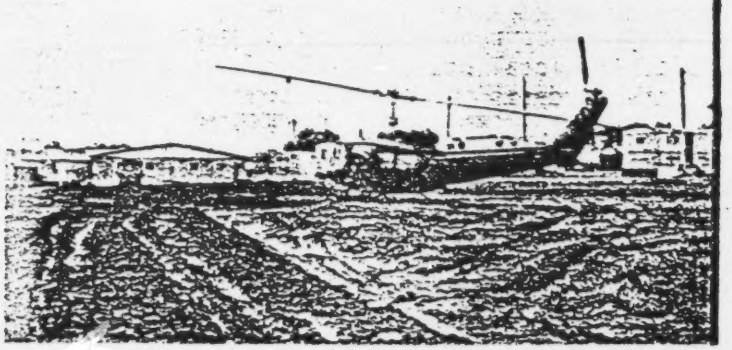
- Emergency Fire Safety Repair funds secured from FICOID bring school facilities up to safety codes.

1982 - Black Mesa selected as top Congressional priority for BIA facility construction funds in FY 83. Congressional funding approved in the amount of $1 million for sch. facility. is1

1974
Initial remodeling completed; school opened.

1977
Signing the first BIA contract.

1977
Drilling the well.



1978
Airlift of food and emergency supplies.

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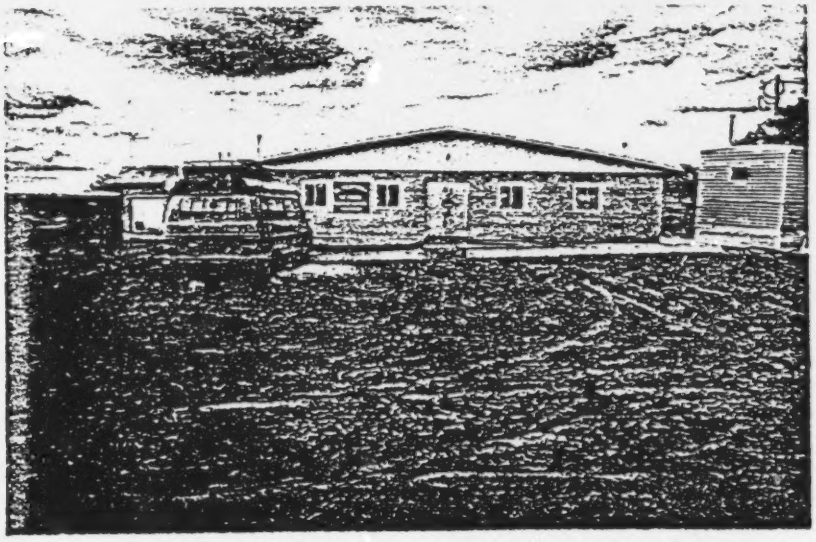
Black Mesa Com. Sch. is a small school with only three regular classrooms: pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten, grades 1 - 4, and grades 5 - 8. The school was originally intended to serve only grades K - 4, but was expanded at the request of the community. The current School Board feels it would be preferable to have the seventh- and eighth-grade students attend another school, large enough to offer the curricular, vocational, and athletic opportunities that Black Mesa cannot afford to offer.

In addition to the regular classroom instructional teachers, Title I reading and ESL are taught by another teacher. Each one is faced with the challenge of individualizing instruction in all areas for children of varying ages, abilities, experiences, and English fluency.



The school's program has been developed to meet the specific needs of the local students. The basis for the program is the students' transition from Navajo to English instruction, and from a Navajo to a global cultural outlook. The program attempts to enable students to make meaningful choices for their future by providing them with skills and confidence to succeed off the reservation, while supporting the culture and values fundamental to life within the reservation community.

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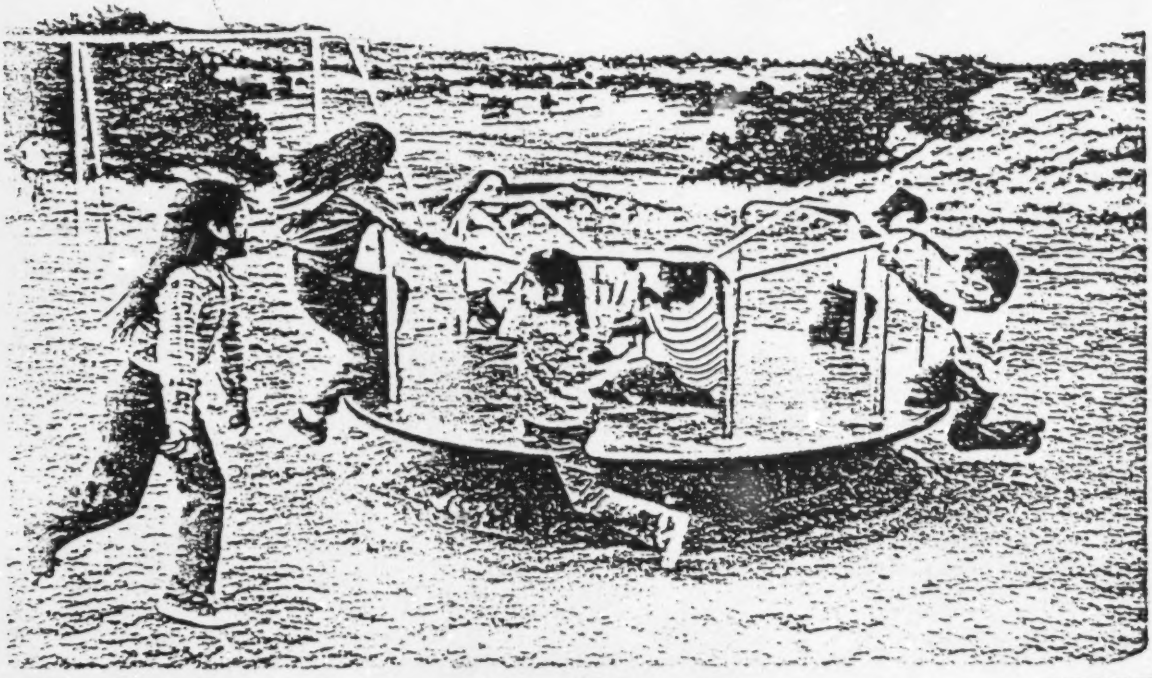
The youngest students' instruction is focused on allowing them to expand their personal and cultural outlook to include the school. Their instruction is begun in Navajo with the exception of oral English introduced as a second language. Their program is center-oriented; this means that different activities are planned to occur in different areas of the classroom set up as learning centers not all of which will require the teacher's help or instruction. The activities are carefully planned to fit the appropriate developmental capabilities of the students, to enable them to develop a pattern of success in school.



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The instructional program in grades 1 - 4 is also organized by centers. During these grades, the students make a transition from instruction in Navajo to instruction in English supported by Navajo. Their academic studies include science, social studies/Navajo cultural studies, English (oral and written), language arts, reading, mathematics, fine arts, physical education and health, and special education as needed.

BLACK

COMMUNIT

design for school logo submitted by

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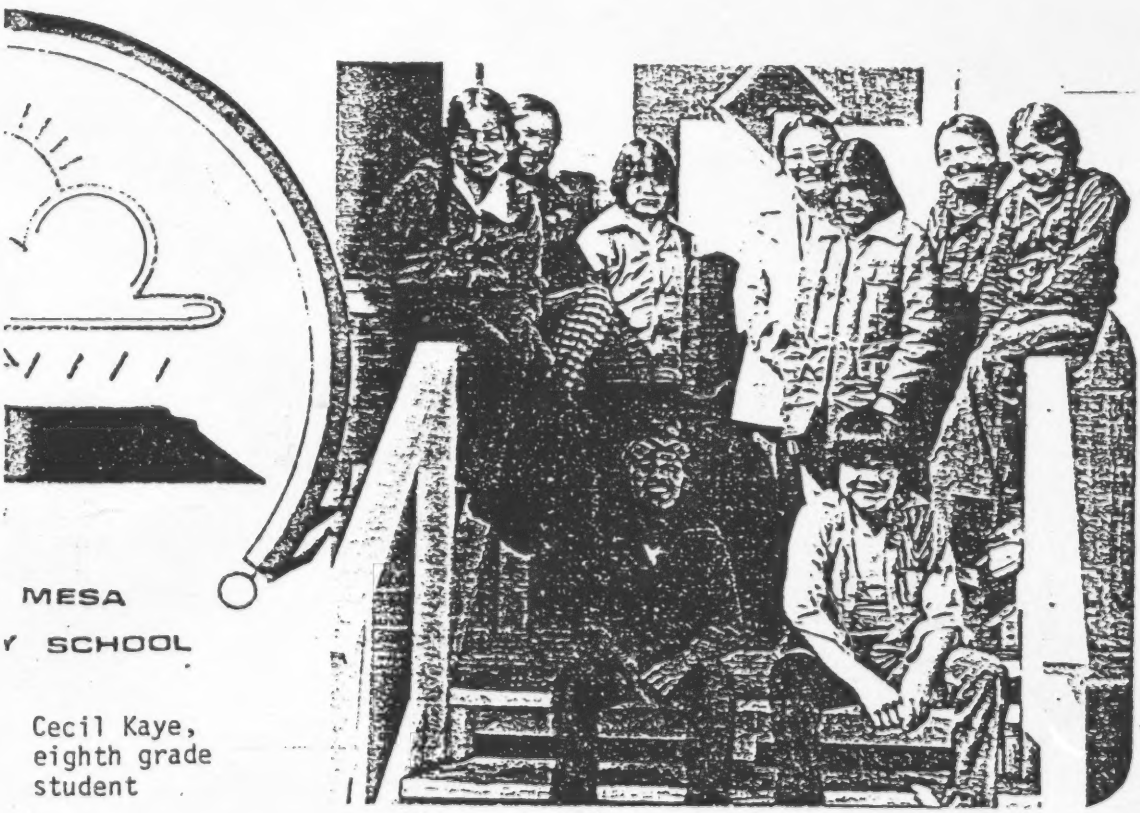
The curriculum for the older children is individualized diagnostic-prescriptive. This allows the teacher to determine the specific skills that each student needs to learn and to provide lessons that enable him or her to study individually at their own pace. In addition to the other subjects taught, an attempt is made to provide some vocational training, to the extent that the current facilities allow. Much of the instruction at this level is focused on insuring that the students have developed the necessary life skills to survive on or off the reservation.

The Black Mesa Community School Board feels that this overall program of studies best provides for the needs of the students of Black Mesa.



MESA

SCHOOL

Cecil Kaye, eighth grade student

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Black Mesa
Community
School

There are many **STRENGTHS** emerging from the Black Mesa Community School program:

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

greatly increased contact between the school and the homes resulting in more parental involvement and concern in school affairs.

BETTER SELF IMAGE

for the students, as there is less dichotomy between their school and their homes.

for the parents and the community, since they see their dreams for self-determination and development realized.

PRIDE

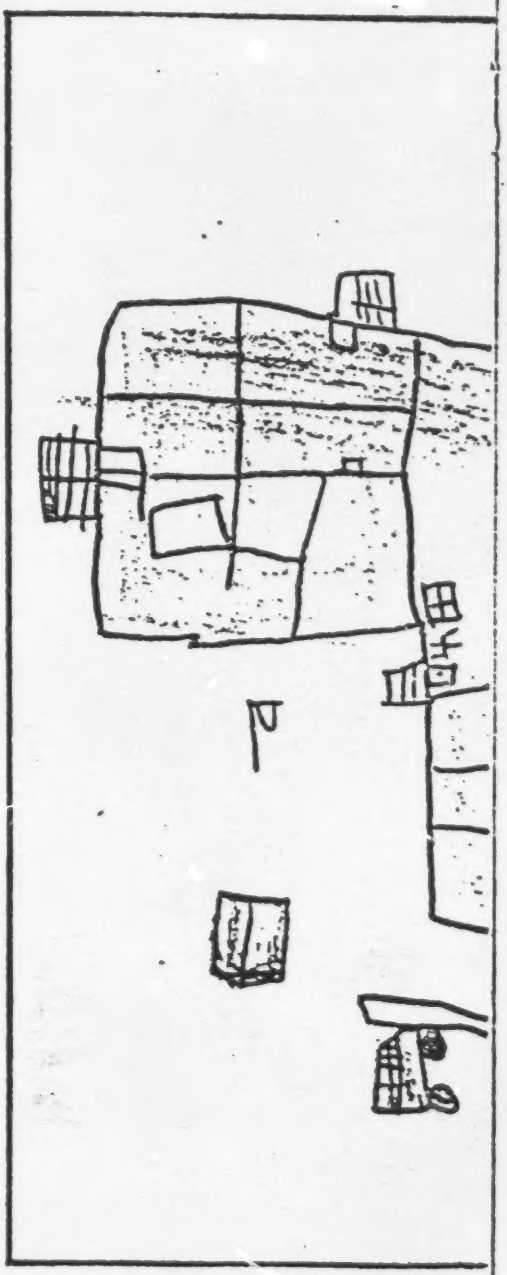
an increased sense of self worth and accomplishment.

in the school as an Indian institution.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

local water and sewer systems

electric power lines



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as pictured by
Phillip Begay,
first grade student

There are still needs which could be seen as **WEAKNESSES:**

ROADS

often impassable, they are the biggest cause of attendance problems; the school has bought seven transmissions for the two school buses in 1981-82 alone.

FACILITIES

still using the "temporary" facilities converted from Atomic Energy Commission surplus in 1973, the school's educational program would be greatly strengthened by the provision of better teaching facilities.

because of the school's status as a "previously-private" school, the BIA has refused to provide full funding for the maintenance and operation costs necessary.

ISOLATION

the school's location and lack of access make it difficult to attract and hold qualified personnel.

FUNDING

relying on BIA and other federal funds makes the continuing operation of the school difficult if not at times risky.

requirements necessary to secure and maintain funding do not allow sufficient time for administrative attention to program needs.

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BLACK MESA COMMUNITY SCHOOL

BOX 215 STAR ROUTE NO. 1

ROUGH ROCK, ARIZONA 86503

SCHOOL BOARD

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ANNA REDHAIR, Member

DIRECTOR

DOROTHY R. YAZZIE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
BLACK MESA COMMUNITY SCHOOL
BIA CONTRACT NOOC 1420 8932

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE OF THE CONTRACT

To provide a local day-school educational program for the children of Black Mesa/Forest Lake Chapters.

OBJECTIVES OF THE CONTRACT

To provide a day-school educational program for the children of Black Mesa/Forest Lake Chapters in order that:

1. Children and parents are not separated, therefore maintaining continuity of family and home life and culture.
2. Parents are more directly involved in and concerned for the education of their child(ren), thus promoting a more positive attitude toward and greater success in formal academic study by the children.
3. Children develop the positive self-image and self-confidence basic to healthy adult life, by eliminating the competition between school and home inherent in any boarding school situation.

To maintain a locally controlled school by a locally elected School Board, so that:

1. The members of the community can better express their concern for and involvement in the education of community youth.
2. The community can understand and utilize the principles of self-determination in local affairs.
3. The school's goals, objectives, and direction remain relevant to the needs and desires of the local community.

SCOPE OF THE CONTRACT

The Black Mesa Community School Board seeks to secure contracts related to the education of the local community children. The scope of the contract is thus defined as those activities that directly or indirectly provide for the operation of a local day-school educational program:

BIA - Program Funds. Those activities directly related to the provision of a basic educational program, including academic personnel and services, food services and personnel, and transportation services and personnel.

BIA - Operations and Maintenance. Those activities related to the up-keep and maintenance of the facilities needed for the educational program, including the provision of staff housing.

BIA - Indirect Costs. Those activities related to the administration of the educational program and related contract administration.

Title I. Those activities related to the provision of supplemental educational services.

Johnson-O'Malley. Those activities related to the operation of an emergency dormitory program in order to maintain the continuity of the educational program during severe inclement weather.

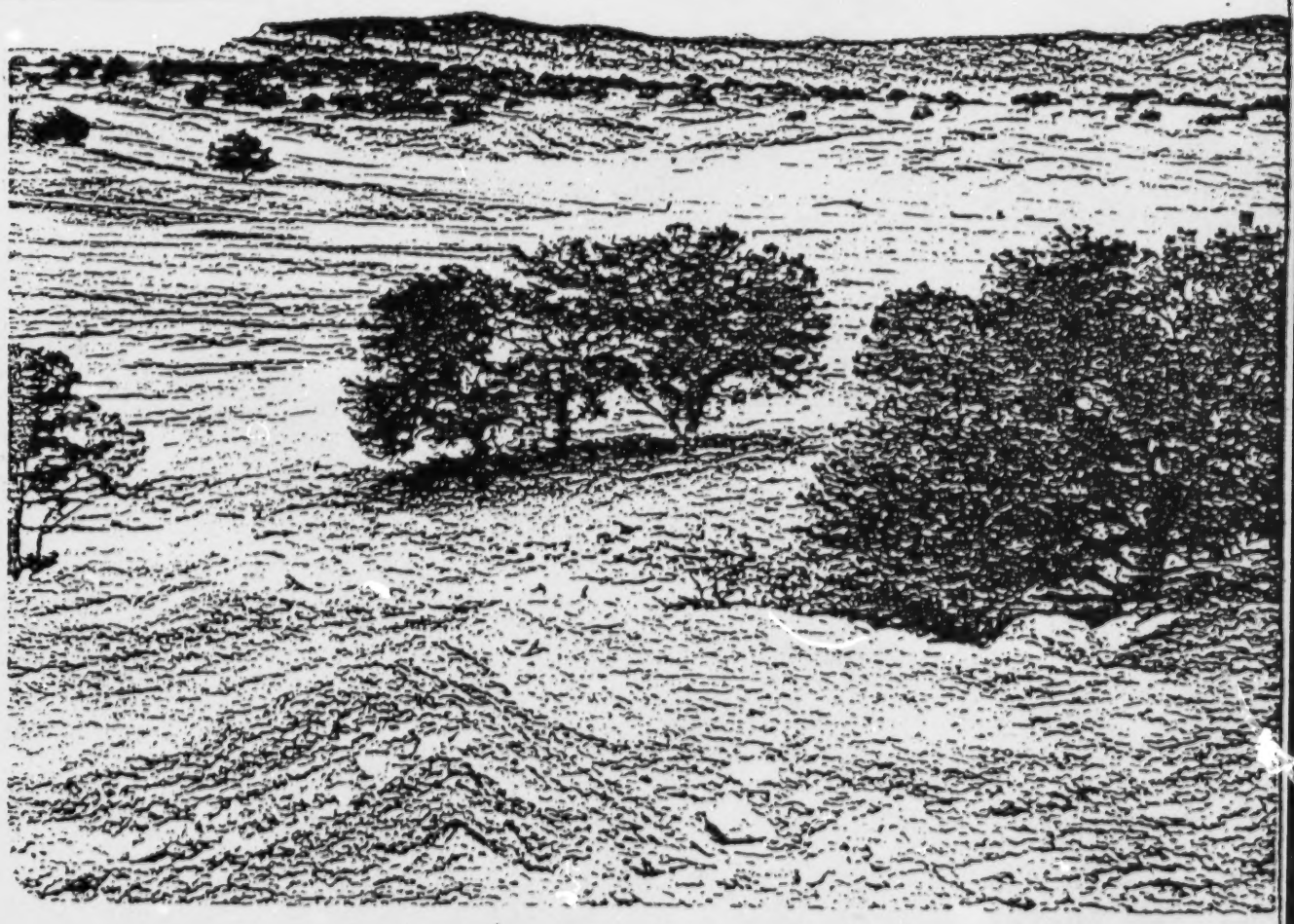
Title IV. Those activities related to providing supplemental educational experiences in support of the basic educational program.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

The ultimate question after conducting such a review must be: What does this tell us?

Some things that we have learned from the past that will guide the future of the school are:

Community involvement takes time and training. It requires an administration and board committed to providing opportunities for input and willing to listen. It requires a commitment to the extra time it takes to expand decision-making. Indian self-determination requires just that, that the individuals involved show determination and commitment to the success of the project.



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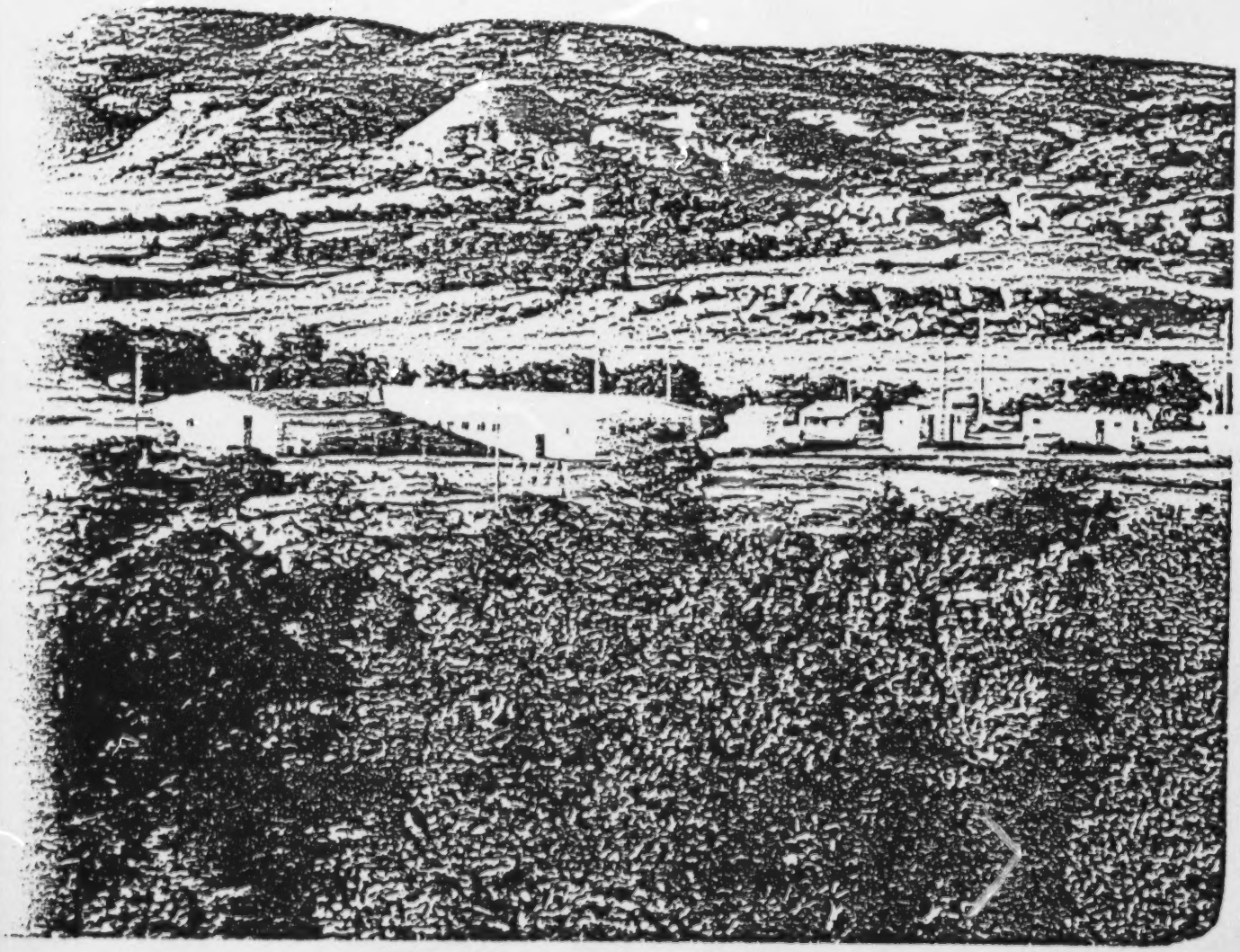
Academic excellence is a goal worth achieving. Of the students who spent at least a full year at the school, eighty-two percent of those who could have completed high school by this time have done so. Of those who have graduated, one third of the former Black Mesa students were either valedictorian or salutatorian of their high school graduating class.

Dreams can be realized, but only through hard work. There is now a school where there once was only grazing land, but only because of the efforts of everyone connected with the school and the faith of the community who refused to give up their dreams.



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